

*The Nature, Causes, and Consequences of Divisions
for the sake of Greater Edification.*

A
S E R M O N

Preached before the
University of OXFORD

May 6. 1705.

By THOMAS RENNELL, M. A.
Fellow of Exeter Coll.

Printed at the Request of M^r Vice-Chancellor.

*Let us follow after the things which make for peace, and things with
which one may Edifie another. Rom. 14. 19.*



OXFORD.

Printed at the THEATER, For George West. MDCCV.

The Nature, Causes, and Consequences of Divisions
for the sake of Greater Modesty on

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May 6. 1707.

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Let us follow after the thing which is good, and things which
which one may hope another. Rom. 14. 19.

OXFORD.
Printed at the THEATRE, For George W. & M. BODLEY.

depart from the Establishment Church, and joy in
~~themselves, as the Church takes them to the~~
~~next body of Christians that comes in their way.~~
 And now would not any one, that is unac-
 quainted with the principles of our Holy Reli-
 gion, and should judge of it only from the practice

1 Cor. 3: 3, 4.

*For ye are yet Carnal: for whereas there
 is among you envying, and strife, and divi-
 sions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?*

*For while one saith, I am of Paul, and
 another I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?*

THERE is no one thing in the whole
 new Testament preſt upon us with greater
 earnestness and frequency, then Peace and Unity,
 and the avoiding Strife and Divisions; and yet,
 to the shame and reproach of those that call them-
 selves by the name of Christ, nothing is more
 remarkable, and gives greater offence, then the
 many and incurable Divisions which have rent
 in pieces the Church and Body of Christ: the
 flightest pretences are made use of, and, as it
 were, on purpose hunted after, to ground Sepa-
 rations upon; and as if Union and Church Com-
 munion were things purely indifferent, or such
 pernicious and hurtfull things rather as we were
 carefully to avoid, men now a days wantonly

A

depart

depart from the Establish'd Church, and joyn themselves, as the humour takes them, to the next Body of Christians that comes in their way.

And now would not any one, that is unacquainted with the precepts of our Holy Religion, and should judge of it only from the practice of its professors, be tempted to believe, either that there were no Commands in the Gospel enjoining Union, or that those who would be thought the most Zealous assertors of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ were really its greatest enemies, and such as by *dividing it against it self*, were endeavouring to bring it to Desolation?

Luke. 11.
17.

Now if we examine upon what grounds and reasons they have been so forward and eager in their opposition to the Church Establish'd, and why they have seperated themselves from it; we shall find, that pretences to purer Ordinances and a more spiritual way of Worship, to better Teaching and greater Edification, have always had a great stress lain upon them, and are, with very many, the top and bottom of all the pleas they alledge for their dividing from us. According to the Principles of these men then, we must suppose it to be their opinion, that such passionate desires of greater purity and better teaching, are certain marks of a *Spiritual*, and not a *Carnal* Mind; and therefore if *Apollos* were a more affectionate

fectionate Preacher and Edifying Man (in their language) than *Paul*, they must esteem that person, not only blameless, but highly commendable, who should be so carefull of his salvation, as to follow the best teaching, tho' at the expence of Peace and Unity. But alas! if we will allow of the Judgment of an Apostle, inspir'd by the Spirit of Truth, this is quite otherwise, and he will tell us that *Envy*, and *Strife*, and then more especially *Divisions*, upon account of our Teachers, are evident and undeniable marks of a *Carnal mind*, of an ignorant zeal and ill grounded warmth; he will assure us, that those who fall into Envy, and Strife, and Separation, upon this pretence, are only Babes in Christ, or such as having advanc'd no farther than the very first Principles of Christianity, are utter strangers to the general nature and tendency of it, *For ye are yet carnal, for whereas there is among you &c.*

I shall discourse upon these words in the following Method.

I shall shew,

- I. What are the Divisions here spoken of, and the occasions of them.
- II. How far they may be urg'd against our present Divisions and Separations.

III. That they proceed from Ignorance and a Carnal mind.

IV. The ill consequences they necessarily draw after them.

I. I am to shew what are the Divisions here spoken of, and the occasions of them.

These will most evidently appear from considering the drift and scope of the Apostles discourse in this and the foregoing Chapters; from whence we may gather, that the Envyings, Strifes and Divisions mention'd in the Text, did not break the Church into different and opposite Communion: tho' they caused the *Corinthians* to rank themselves under their several Teachers, as so many Heads or Leaders, into different Parties, each of which valu'd themselves upon their being the Disciples and Followers of such or such a Teacher, and despis'd such as they suppos'd to be under Pastors of meaner abilities than their own. These were the Divisions: and the occasion of them was their preferring one Doctor or Teacher to the depressing and despising of others; because one was a more eloquent or moving (or as the modern phrase is) *powerfull* Preacher than the rest.

'Tis plain that these *Corinthians* were not divided into distinct and opposite Communion; because

because *St Paul* directs this Epistle to the Church, and not Churches, of God at *Corinth*; and constantly speaks to them as one Communion from the beginning to the end of it. Neither does he charge them with breaking the Unity of the Church, or blame their Teachers for drawing away disciples after them: but seems rather to lay the blame of the Strifes and Divisions he condemns, upon the Peoples setting up their Teachers as heads of Parties and Factions. 'Tis indeed highly probable, that they made up several Congregations, tho' they were still United in one and the same Communion: and this Union, the Divisions and Parties that were found among them, would in all likelihood have broken and confounded; and therefore the Apostle thought the putting a stop to them worth his first and earliest care.

Now that the *Envyng, and Strife, and Divisions* of the *Corinthians* had their rise and occasion from that Emulation they run into upon account of their Teachers, is manifest from several expressions in the first part of this Epistle: thus immediately after mentioning the Contentions that were among them, the Apostle tells us what these were, viz. *every one of them said I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ*; and again, in the text,

the

the reason why St Paul says, *they were carnal* is, *because there were such divisions among them*, which Divisions consisted in this, that one said *I am of Paul*, and another *I am of Apollos*, one preferring this Teacher, and another that, or as C. 4. v. 6. he afterwards expresses it *they were puffed up for one against another*. And 'tis observable, that there is no mention made of any other cause of these *Envyings, Strifes, and Divisions* but only this partial fondness for their own Teachers: as will evidently appear to any one that reads the four first Chapters of this Epistle.

This then being the only occasion of the Heats and Divisions which at this time disturb'd the Church of *Corinth*, viz. their overvaluing each their own proper Teachers, as men of more eminent gifts, and such as they might expect better means of Edification from, than they could enjoy under others; neither the Divisions nor the reasons of them, in the Judgment of our present Dissenters, would seem considerable enough to deserve so particular a notice, much less such severe reprehensions, as the Apostle bestows upon them. And yet he will inform us, that they are so far from being the effects of a commendable Zeal for Gods glory or the Edification of his Church, that they spring from a *Carnal mind*; from such an ignorance in the nature and notion

tion of Christianity, as none but *Babes in Christ* could be guilty of, none but such novices in his Doctrine as did not consider, that whatever their Teachers were, they were no more than Instruments, which God made use of to build them up in their most holy Faith.

Thus it seems to be plain and evident, that the *Divisions, Envyings, and Strife* of the *Corinthians*, took their rise from their fond opinions concerning the excellencies of their Teachers; which made them entertain such Heats and Animosities against each other, as were the occasions of their dividing into several Parties and Factions, tho' they had not as yet set up opposite Communion.

II. I come now, in the second place, to examine, how far the *envying, and strife, and divisions* of the *Corinthians*, may be urg'd against our Brethren who have separated from the Establish'd Church.

And here we must own, that there is one great difference between them, which is this; that the *Corinthians*, however divided into Parties and Factions, had not proceeded to a formal Schism, they still maintain'd Church Communion with each other, when this Epistle was writ to them, (as is observ'd above.) But those of the separation among us, have not contain'd themselves

themselves within these bounds, they have actually made a Schism in the Church of Christ, and set up opposite Communion.

'Tis probable indeed that the *Corinthians* might have done the same, had not this admonition of the Apostle prevented it, and as this Epistle hinder'd their Separation from one another, (for some time at least) so ought it to cure our present Separations, seeing it was written for our admonition and instruction, as well as theirs.

'Tis easy to observe, that this difference will not be very favourable to our Dissenters. If the guilt of the *Corinthians* was great, and the Divisions among them of dangerous consequence; how much more so are their groundless Separations? if the *Envy*, *Strife*, and *Divisions* of the *Corinthians* were marks of a carnal mind: our present Dissensions which have caus'd Divisions and opposite Partys in the Kingdom, the Household, the Body of Christ, must be liable to a heavier charge and draw after them a greater guilt: there being this wide difference between their Divisions and those of our Dissenters, that those have already produc'd the sour Fruit of actual Schism, and these were only budding in order to it.

This difference being observ'd between the Divisions of the *Corinthians* and the Separations of

of our times, let us next see wherein they agreed with one another. *Tho' the case of the Followers of Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas, won't reach the rigid Separatists, who are so ill inform'd, and so little acquainted with the statutes of Christianity, as to believe it unlawfull to joyn in Communion with us: Tho' it won't, I say, affect these, any farther than to perswade their Agreement with us, as far and in as many instances, as possibly they can, in order to the lessening (since they think they cannot heal) the breach between us; yet it will certainly bear hard upon all such as allow our Communion to be lawful, and give no other reasons for their Separation from it, but purer Ordinances and better means of Edification. This is the case of great numbers of them; and all those, at least, who plead for, and practice Occasional Conformity, can alledge nothing else in their own defence.*

These persons may, according to their own principles, joyn with the Establish'd Church without sin, if the *Corinthians* could joyn with one another without it; for greater Edification and taking more care of their Souls, were as good reasons for Divisions then as they are now, and they might as lawfully have proceeded to a formal Schism, upon these accounts, as our dif-

senting Brethren; and from hence we may conclude, that as St *Paul* condemns the Envyings Strifes and Divisions of the *Corinthians* which had not as yet caus'd an actual Separation; so he would much more severely charge the guilt of Schism upon those that divide from our Church, upon the same pretences.

I shall not, at present, examin how justly the Dissenters pretend to better means of Edification in their Assemblies, than can be met with in the Church of England; we may safely enough leave that to the judgment of the Sensible part of Mankind. But since they are so very sure that their Preachers are more edifying than those of the establish'd Church, let us c^{on} grant it them, and inquire whither this pretence will be sufficient to justify their Separation.

The negative seems to be evident, from what St *Paul* argues against the dividing *Corinthians*, in the beginning of this Epistle: for if it be not lawfull *to be puffed up for one against another*, to say *I am of Paul*, because he is endued with more and greater Gifts, *I am of Apollos*, because he is more Eloquent &c. If we are to look upon all these Teachers with their several talents, as Instruments only in God's hands, as *labourers only with him*; and our selves as God's *husbandry and building*. If the planter and
waterer

waterer in God's husbandry are as nothing, and the increase, (or in other words, the Edification) must come from God, then 'tis plain and evident, that we are to expect increase and Edification from him, in the use of the Ministers and Instruments which he hath appointed; and not from the bare consideration of the Gifts and Abilities of these Instruments. Then our preferring one, in contempt, or to the depressing of another, must be laid aside as Carnal and Sinfull, and we must with modesty and humility make use of the means God hath given us for our Edification; humbly look up to him for the increase of our Spiritual gifts, nor wantonly quarrel with his dispensations, or look out any other Teachers then such as are of his appointment.

When therefore Men divide the Church of God upon pretence of better instruction and proficiency, they leave God's method to follow their own; or rather, set up their own fancies in opposition to his wisdom, which looks like rebelling against him, in order to their being more acceptable to him.

If then, according to *St Paul's* arguing, it be unlawfull to divide the Church of God for the sake of greater Edification, or the preference given to one Teacher above another; if this be what *St Paul* condemns in the *Corinthians*. I sup-

pose, it can hardly be said, that he does not, at the same time, condemn the present Separation among us, because we own there was none such among the *Corinthians*: for if he blames Envy, and Strife, and Dividing into Parties; his reprehensions would have fallen more severely upon Separation, which carries these to their greatest height, and drives them to the most pernicious extremes: and we may as well argue, that our blessed Saviour does not forbid *murdering* our Brother, when he prohibits all *causeless Anger and opprobrious Language* towards him; as that St *Paul* does not condemn Separation because he here only reprehends the beginnings of it.

Math. 5.
v. 21, 22.

Perhaps it may be said, that this objection from better means of Edification, is but one of the many, which those who separate from the establish'd Church, have to urge in their own vindication. To which we may answer, that if they be satisfy'd it won't bear the stress they lay upon it, if it be no sufficient ground for Separation, as I think it sufficiently evident that 'tis not, for the least disagreement; let them wholly drop it, and insist no longer upon it, that they may not widen the breach between us by groundless and unnecessary Aggravations. If they be really satisfy'd, that 'tis of no force to prove the necessity of

of their Dividing from us, let their Teachers deal plainly and honestly with their Hearers, and fairly tell them, that they ought not to follow them, or leave their own Pastors upon this account; because this pretence will not in the least justify their withdrawing themselves from the Establish'd Church. But if any of them will still humour ignorant people, in their running after strange Guides, for the sake of greater Edification, they must be look'd upon as the main causes and occasions of the needless Schism, of all those at least, that give this as the reason of their leaving our Assemblies. Nor can they without such a plain declaration, free themselves from the guilt of other mens sins, in which they are partakers, whensoever they wilfully mislead them. And tho' Charity obliges us always to think and hope the best we can, yet they must give us leave to say, *that such as draw away disciples after them, when they themselves cannot defend the Principles upon which they do it, and yet will not inform those that rely upon their judgments, what are, or are not, justifiable grounds of Separation, do very nearly resemble those which St Paul speaks of, who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine of our holy Religion* (which so often and so earnestly recommend Peace and Unity) and

Rom. 16.
v. 17. 18.

may justly be suspected of *serving, not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own bellies, and by good words and fair speeches deceiving the hearts of the simple.* But indeed, this pretence of greater Edification is so taking a bait, and (bating only the immodesty of it) so every way plausible, that we can hardly hope they will drop it, till they be touch'd with more lively convictions of the sin and danger of Separation, and a more disinterested zeal for the glory of God and the good of his Church: for of all those that are loose and unstable in matters of Church Communion, I believe far the greatest part are impos'd upon by this specious pretence; and perhaps the giving up this one plea, would put an end to many of their meetings for want of sufficient numbers of Auditors to hear and maintain their Teachers.

As to the Hearers, that joyn themselves to separate Congregations. One can hardly suspect, at first sight, that this willingness to be better instructed (which appears in too many ignorant indeed, but well meaning People) should proceed from any other cause than a commendable desire of advancing themselves in Christian Knowledge: and their being willing *to understand the way of God more perfectly than they think they can do in our Assemblies.* An endeavour to save themselves, by a more entire Knowledge

Knowledge of, and conformity to, the Will of God, is a fair pretence, and too many mistaken People are led away with it; but if we will more narrowly observe and consider it, we shall find, that it has its Foundation in *Ignorance* and a *Carnal mind*, the third thing to be insisted on, viz.

III. That Strifes and Divisions about Teachers and Spiritual Guides, proceed from Ignorance and a Carnal mind.

This is sufficiently evident from the Text and the words just before it, which pronounce the *Corinthians Carnal and Babes in Christ* for this very reason, because they said, *one, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, &c.* and the Reason of this will plainly appear from considering what is meant by the Carnal and Spiritual mind in the Apostolick Writings.

By the Carnal mind the Apostles mean, one given up to such desires, inclinations, and appetites, as gratifie and proceed from corrupted Nature. These they call the Works of the Flesh, among which are reckon'd by our Apostle, *Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, * Sects, Envyings.* And we may in general esteem all these Works of the Flesh, which are opposite to the moral Precepts of Christianity, and that Peace and

Gal. 5.

v. 20.

* Aigine

and Love, as well as Purity, which it recom-
mends and enjoyns its Professors. And on the
contrary, the Fruits of the Spirit are said to be
Love and Peace, and all such other Vertues as
constitute and adorn the Christian life. That then
is a Carnal mind, which is under the power of
Fleshly, Sensual, Worldly, or corrupt Passions
and Dispositions: and that a Spirituall one which
is free from such, and is under the gracious In-
fluences of the *B. Spirit*, and the desires and in-
clinations which that inspires it with, such as
Love, Joy, Peace, above mention'd, which those
who separate themselves, without sufficient
grounds, *are sensual and have not.*

Jude v. 19.

If then this Preference of Teachers, and
the Separations proceeding from it, spring from
Carnal Desires, and bring forth the Works of the
Flesh; tis evident that those who are guilty of
them, (be their pretences what they will) are
under the influences of a Carnal Mind. And in
this case, tho' greater Edification and a tender
Regard for their Salvation, be the things pre-
tended; yet tis much to be suspected, that Igno-
rance and Pride, a wanton Liberty and a world-
ly Temper, lie at the bottom, and strongly byas
mens minds towards Schisms and Divisions: and
therefore it would be very becoming and neces-
sary for the Disciples of the Prince of Peace to
be

be well inform'd, and carefully examin their own hearts, as well as the motives and reasons they act upon, before they be so hardy as to divide from an Establish'd Church; lest they unwarily run themselves into the dreadful guilt of Schism. Now it hath been already prov'd, that there can be no sufficient reasons for Separation, drawn from the pretence of greater Edification; and therefore we must ascribe them to the causes above mention'd; and w^{ch} sh^{al} be to administer

1. Ignorance is one great cause of Divisions upon account of the Excellency of Teachers.

Were People better acquainted with the grounds and main designs of Christianity; they would not be so easily *losted to and fro with every wind of Doctrine, or deceived by the good words and fair speeches* of Seducers. 'Tis because of their Divisions that St. Paul, in the verses before the Text, tells the *Corinthians they were babes in Christ*. And, indeed, it would be impossible, were men as honest and knowing as they should be, that the Body of Christ should be divided upon such groundless pretences as are made use of for that purpose. Christ has pray'd with great fervency, *that his Church might be one*; 'tis represented as one throughout the whole New Testament, as one Body, one House, one Temple, Belief in the one Holy Catholick

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Church

Church is an Article of our Creed; and yet people depart from this Unity, with as little scruple, as if it were a meer indifferent thing whither they continu'd in it or no. If we inquire what mighty Improvements they make, under these means of Edification, for the sake of which they separate themselves from a sound part of the Body of Christ, we shall find them so very small, that they may still be reckon'd of the number of those whom the Apostle mentions, when he says, *they are such as are ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*: such as, for the most part, are meer Strangers to the fundamental Doctrins of the Gospel, and can give no tolerable account why they call themselves Christians. Such as take a sanctified look, odd gestures, a dolefull tone, and some moving Expressions, with very little solid Sense and sound Doctrine at Bottom, for Edifying Preaching, and the Persons that deliver such Discourses, and in such a manner, for Heavenly Men. They are such as look upon the obscure and intricate Doctrins about God's Decrees, Justification, Reprobation, free Grace, &c. oddly explain'd and apply'd, as very Instructive and Soul-saving Preaching; and despise the stating and clearing the Doctrins of Morality, the import and necessity of *living soberly, righteously,*
and

2 Tim. 3.
v. 7.

*and godly in this present world, as low and mean Dispensations, in comparison with their more sublime and mystical Divinity. Thus their Ignorance is the Mother of their Devotion, and links them fast to their seducing Guides, whereas, were they but tolerably well acquainted with the glorious Ends of the Gospel, and the Mission of its Divine Author; they would soon perceive, that what they so much value and esteem as Spiritual Teaching, would contribute little or nothing to his great Design, which was, *the purifying to himself a peculiar People zealous of good works*: then they would learn to submit themselves to those that have the Rule over them, for Conscience sake, and modestly make use of their Assistance, together with their own hearty Endeavours, expecting to be built up in their most Holy faith, by the means which God hath appointed, and promised to assist with his Blessing; and not from following their own giddy fancies, and heaping up to themselves such teachers as are not intrusted with the care of their Souls.*

2. Next to Ignorance in the Doctrins of Christ, we may reckon Pride another main ground of causeless Separations.

Conjention, the fore-runner of Divisions, flows so naturally from this Vice, that Solomon says, *it*

Prov. 13.
v. 10.

only comes from thence: and it is very obvious to observe, how great a share it has in our present Dissentions. Were people as humble, and meek, and modest, as becomes the Disciples of the *Blessed Jesus*, they would be content to learn more, and judge less. But when they once leave their own proper Sphere of Hearers, and take upon them the office of Censurers, there is no end of such intermeddling with what does not belong to them; and yet we shall find this, one main Cause of our Divisions, arising from the preference of Teachers. Every one is willing and forward to shew his skill in these matters, and thinks himself injur'd, if he may not be allow'd to exercise his censures upon the gifts and abilities of his Instructors: and yet a little modesty and reflecting upon their own Defects, would teach these Men, that they are not so very well qualified to pass their Judgment in things of this nature as they imagin; seeing they would often be at a loss for an Answer, were they ask'd the Reason of their like or dislike. And how indeed should they be able to tell, why one Preacher edifies more than another, who do not know what Edification is? 'tis Pride therefore, and a conceited Opinion of their own Attainments, that thus sets them up for Judges and thereby draws them into Schism and Separation.

There

There is another thing which they cannot submit to, and that is the Obedience they owe to their spiritual Guides and Governours. It is troublesome and uneasy to haughty Spirits, to obey them that have the Rule over them, and submit themselves to those that watch for their Souls. They love to exert their liberty, and therefore make use of all pretences to break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from them. Perhaps a severe reproof, a taxing them with some ill habit, and stirring up their Conscience against them, may sometimes add to their other Grievances: and when not only their Humour and Liberty are abridg'd, and the Impositions of the Church thwart their Fancies; but they are gall'd with the remembrance of their Faults too: then they take shelter in Separation, and retreat to such Assemblies as are more indulgent to their capricious humours. Thus let the Discourses of a Pastor be sound and substantial, his Admonitions grave and serious, his Reprehensions mild and gentle, and all the Exercise of his Ministerial Function, such as becomes a good Steward of the Mysteries of God, yet if these do not suit the Palate, Humour and wrong Apprehensions of an arrogant Hearer, he may plead Conscience for his Separation, and upon pretence of better Instruction, withdraw from the Communion of the Church.

There

There is a sort of Pride too, which Men take, in reckoning themselves in a better Condition than their Neighbours, and looking contemptibly upon them for sitting down contentedly under meaner Ordinances, (as they call them) when they enjoy such as are better and more Spiritual; upon this they flatter themselves with their taking greater care of their spiritual Condition than others, and think they have a right to say to them, *come not near me, I am holier than thou.* And these pleasing Fancies will so far delude them, that let the Government and Constitution of the Church be perfectly agreeable to the Decency and order prescrib'd in the holy Scriptures, and every way fitted to the building up Christians in their most holy Faith; yet impatience of restraint, an uneasiness under Government, a reproof that shall be interpreted an Affront, or a fancied advantage, shall drive a proud Pretender out of the Fold of Christ, into strange, forbidden, and dangerous Pastures. And how contrary is this behaviour to the Precepts of that Lord and Master, who bids us *learn of him because he is meek and lowly in heart?* how far is such a Temper from that meekness and humility, which become the genuine Disciples of such a Master and from a due submission to his Appointments in his Church?

3. Neither

3. Neither has Levity and Curiosity a less share in these dividing Principles than Pride and Ignorance.

When itching Ears are brought to the hearing of God's Word, and the pleasing of these is made the Standard of Edification; 'tis no great wonder if People that are troubled with them *heap up Teachers to themselves*, and chuse such as may be most gratefull to their Fancies. When this Humour prevails, it makes People look upon Sermons as a piece of News or Entertainment, in which they are at liberty to please themselves. They go indeed to some Religious Assemblies, (as the *Athenians* came to St Paul's Preaching,) out of meer curiosity, to hear something new and and strange. The end of hearing, viz. the learning their Duty, is forgotten, and pleasing themselves set up in the room of it. And that this is often the case of such as separate from the Church for the sake of greater Edification, is evident from this: that the Persons who are so solicitous about the best means of Instruction, are generally no better (nay 'tis well if they are not worse) than their Neighbours. They are diligent *Hearers*, 'tis true; but are they as diligent *Doers of the Word*? they are mov'd with the Zeal and fervency of their Teachers; but do there appear any visible Effects of this in their
 3 Lives

Lives and Conversations? they are better pleas'd with, and are very sure they are more Edified (as they love to speak) by this Teacher than another; but are they wiser or better then others all this while? But nevertheless they are very sure tis so, and who will be so hardy as to contradict Experience? Indeed Men of this temper seem to reckon Hearing their Duty, or perhaps some abstruse Doctrines instead of it, for which they neither are nor can be the better; to be all they have to mind. They suppose their being, for the present, mov'd with the Sense of their Sins, is real Edification, tho' they never think of Applying the Doctrines they hear, or the Passions they stir up in them, to the reforming such vitious habits as have gotten the Dominion over them.

And now if Separation from an Establish'd Church, upon pretence of greater Edification, and the preference of Teachers, be a practice that can by no means be justify'd; if it be so much more blameable than the Envyings, and Strifes, and Divisions, of the *Corinthians*; by how much Rents and Schisms in the Church of Christ, are worse than Strife and Divisions in it, without Schism; if it proceed from a Carnal Mind, and want of true Christian Knowledge (tho' guilded with the fair pretences of a more earnest Care and

and Condemn of the Schismatick for his Salvation. If it owe its rise to such fleshy lusts as Pride and Peevishness, Curiosity and itching Ears: into how dangerous and fatal a delusion are these men fallen, who run into the dreadfull Guilt of wounding and dividing the Body of Christ upon this account? Certainly the great Enemy of Mankind must use more than common artifice and cunning, to deceive people into an opinion, that they are taking more care of their Souls than others, when they are putting themselves out of the ordinary way of Salvation, by cutting themselves off from the Body of Christ; else it would be impossible they could think to grow in the Graces of the Spirit, among which are reckon'd, Love, Peace, Humility, and Charity, by such Practices as are opposite to, and destructive of, all these,

Which brings me to shew in, the last place;

IV. The fatal Tendency and sad Consequences of such Causeless Divisions and Separations

These are too many to be particularly insisted on; and therefore I shall content my self with observing only two of the chief of them.

I. Then such Divisions are destructive of Love and Charity, and produce Strife, Confu-

D

sion,

sion, and all the ill consequences of Hatred and Enmity among mankind.

As nothing is more contrary to the Nature and Spirit of Christianity, than Hatred and Contentions; so nothing is more likely to produce these, than Schisms and Divisions. For seeing Religion is look'd upon as a matter of the utmost importance, because our Eternal welfare depends upon it; from hence it will necessarily happen, that those who differ in their sentiments about it, will dispute with one another in order (as they charitably think) to reclaim their Brethren from their Errours, and bring them over to the Truth; and the infinite concernment of the thing in dispute, together with a full perswasion, in both the contending parties, that they are each of them in the right, will certainly dispose them to maintain their own opinions with Zeal and Obstinacy, and look upon those who will not be convinc'd by their Arguments, as Enemies to Truth; and hence commences perpetual enmity between them. But besides the importance of the thing it self, Disputes are, upon many other accounts, apt to wound Charity and set men at variance with one another: thus proyoking Language, Contempt of an Adversary, and maintaining our Assertions upon point of Honour, that we might not seem to be baffled;

baffled; are apt to exasperate, and to stir up Paſſions that commonly end in Hatred and Ill-will. Beſides, it often happens, that the leſs the Difference is between the oppoſite Parties, the warmer are their Conteſts and the greater their Animofities; the reaſon of which may perhaps be, becauſe men think it ſtrange that any one ſhould obſtinately perſiſt in a Difference ariſing from meer trifles, and ſuſpect the Sincerity of their Pretenſions that do ſo; and this begets in them an Averſion to ſuch Perſons and Practices. But however that be, this is evident and undeniable, that whatever be the Grounds of Diviſions; Envyings and Quarrels will be the Conſequences of them. Theſe Effects we of this Nation have too fatally experienc'd: and may the Divine Goodneſs protect us from the Dangers we have cauſe to fear from the ſame Cauſes at preſent.

If it be ſaid, that theſe diſmal Effects won't follow from ſuch Diviſions as are made for the ſake of greater Edification. I anſwer, that the leſs the Cauſe of them is, the more Unreaſonable muſt the Separation be thought; and the more Odious will They appear, who cauſe, or practice, or encourage it. And beſides, when People have once ſet up Fancy for a Guide in the room of a ſound Judgment, and a proud Affectation of Novelty, inſtead of a meek and teachable Diſpoſition,

sition, they will soon find, or make, more plausible pretences for their Separation, because they are willing to continue in it. Their Wits and Inventions will be put upon the rack to search for, and muster up Objections; till at last, what was only *Inconvenient*, shall become *unlawfull*, and thus the wound shall be Incurable, and the divided Parties set at so wide a distance from any Agreement, that they shall never meet without bidding Defiance to each other.

These are the usual and natural Consequences of such Divisions. And who is there that can assure himself, when he departs from the Establish'd Church upon such slight Pretences, that he shall not be one of those, who turn Christianity into Rebellion, and Religion into Faction? who make the Pure and Peacable Doctrines of the *Prince of Peace* serve as Instruments of War and Slaughter, and under pretence of Reformation, turn their Native Country into a Field of Blood? These are no melancholy Dreams or groundless Surmizes; but what our Fathers have Seen and Felt, and we their Children have cause to Fear. For if every unreasonable Suspicion of more Edifying Preaching, must be a sufficient cause of Separation, one Schism will beget another, and People will run from Sect to Sect so long, till they will cast off all Religion; or at least, leave

no such thing in being as a Christian Church; but every Member or Congregation, will be different from, and opposite to all others. Thus the Body will be no more; for it will be all rent into loose and scatter'd Limbs. The Church it self will be brought back, from a state of Grace to a state of Nature, and it will be well if it don't prove one of *Hobbes's* making too.

2. Another Dreadfull Consequence of such groundless Divisions is, The Scandal and Prejudice they bring upon our Religion, and the Evidence and Excellency of it.

There are too many People of loose Principles, and looser Lives, in the world, who are willing to improve every the least Prejudice, and are fond of every trifling Cavil, that may tend to the Settling themselves and others, in the Principles of Infidelity: and such as these, Greedily catch at the Divisions among Christians, as a solid Objection against all, or the Christian, Religion; as they are most disposed to set up for *Deists* or *Atheists*. Now 'tis sufficiently manifest, that this is no real Objection against the truth of our Religion; but on the contrary, a strong Confirmation of it, for as much as all Parties are agreed in a firm Assent to the main Foundations of it. And 'tis one of the Prophecies of the New Testament, that there should be

Offences

Offences and Divisions among Christians, which hath hereby had its Completion. Nay farther, such Divisions afford us a certain Argument of the Purity and uncorruptness of those *Holy Books*, upon whose Authority we build our Faith; because the many different Parties and Interests, of those that have professed it, make it Morally Impossible, that ever they should all agree to the Corruption or Alteration of them.

But notwithstanding this, the many Divisions among us, and these concerning small and trifling Matters, give *Occasion to those that desire Occasion*, to question and deny our Holy Religion, and Suspect that we our selves do not believe the Truth of it, when they see us making so slight of the Precepts of Peace and Unity, which it so Frequently and Earnestly Recommends to us. They will say, there are so many Sects and Parties among Christians, that their Religion is at best but a very Uncertain thing, seeing they themselves are so little agreed about it. They will tell us, they do not know which to Apply themselves to, or Joyn themselves with, among so many Pretenders to the true way of Worship: That 'tis safer to acquiesce in the Dictates of Natural Reason, in which all agree, than take up a Religion about which even its Professors are so much at variance. And from
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the Fruits of Religious Differences, viz. Quarrels and Contentions, Wars and Bloodshed, they will Argue, that Mankind were safer and quieter without it; that it cannot be so Heavenly an Institution, or owe its being to so Divine an Author as it pretends to: and therefore 'tis Reasonable to think it no more than a politick Devise of crafty States-Men and Priests that find their ends in it. These are the Objections, which wicked Men draw from our Divisions and the Mischief attending them, against our Religion; and I know nothing, saving only the ill Lives of its Professors, that can be urg'd against it with a greater Shew of Reason. And how Shallow soever such Objections may appear to the judgment of Considering and Unprejudic'd Men; yet they are of Weight with the Unthinking, and prove Real Offences to them. And I am apt to beleive, it was upon this Prospect, that our Blessed Saviour, in that Pathetical Prayer which he offers up for his Disciples, *that they might be one as he and his Father were one*, adds these Remarkable Words, as the Reason of his Petition for the Unity of those that should believe on him, viz. *That the world might beleive that his Father had sent him:* and again, *that they might be made perfect in One, that the world might know that God had sent him.* The words

John 13.

21.

v. 23.

are

are so Express to this Purpose, as if our Blessed Lord had then had in his View the Objections that would be Framed, and the Prejudices that would be Taken, by Libertines and Ungodly Men, from the Divisions of his Followers, against the Truth and Reality of his Mission, and the Religion he should establish.

And now if this be the natural Consequence of causeless Separations, to wit: the hardening Irreligious Men in their Infidelity, and causing the Name of God and Christ to be blasphemed among Unbelievers; how heavy will the guilt of them lye upon such as Cause, and such as Joyn, in them. When the confirming the Enemies of the Gospel in their pernicious Ways, shall, in a great Measure, be laid to the charge of such Heady and High-minded Separatists, and they be found partakers in such hainous sins of other men? And certainly, if there could nothing else be laid to the charge of Schism and Separation, besides the Strifes and Quarrels they stir up, and the Confusions they produce, to the Destruction of Peace and Charity. And the Handle they afford Profane Men, to reject and scoff at that Holy Religion we Profess, and blaspheme that *Sacred Name by which we are call'd*. If there were no other ill Consequences of them, than these; (as there are many more) yet these certainly

certainly, with Wise and Good Men, would more powerfully perswade, to the strictest Union with one another (where the Terms of it were not plainly finfull) than any, or all the pretences of *those that lie in wait to deceive*, could possibly do to Divide and Disunite us. And it is Amazing to consider, that such ill-grounded Reasons (and such too, as never were, nor can be, clearly made out;) as greater Edification and purer Ordinances, should be Oppos'd to, and Overballance such Pressing Exhortations, as we meet with, almost in every Book of the New Testament. That they should be able to Enervate and Defeat such Strangely Moving, and Passionate Exhortations as these, *If it be Possible, as much as lieth in you, live Peaceably with all men. If there be any Consolation in Christ, if any comfort of Love, if any Fellowship of the Spirit, if any Bowels and Mercies: Fulfil ye my Joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same Love, being of one Accord, of one Mind.* Rom. 12.
v. 18.
Phil. 2.
v. 1, 2.

If such forcible and affectionate Motives and Intreaties as these, from the Mouth of an Apostle, loose their Effect upon the minds of Perverse and Obstinate men: We, certainly, cannot hope to Prevail with them any other way, than by offering up our most Ardent and Hearty Petitions,

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To

To the God of Patience and Consolations,
 that he would grant, that all those who profess
 the Faith of Christ may be like-minded; and
 laying aside all Carnal Desires and Affections,
 keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace
 and in Righteousness of Life through Jesus
 Christ our Lord.

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